17: Southall E-5 (1946-1947) 1952 FL11 Luo FL11

is a most important grouping intermediate between the compound family and its individual members. It is a semi-autonomous domestic unit with its own kitchen economy, its own property rights in cattle, goats, sheep, chickens, land, tools, granaries, and food stocks. Correspondingly it is responsible for its own building and repairs, fuel and water collecting, food provision and allocation from harvest to harvest, and has its own ritual rights and obligations. But the husband is an element common to them all and, having his own rights and duties in respect of these matters, binds them closely together. Livestock are herded co-operatively, not only for all the elementary families of a homestead, but for several homesteads together. The husband is the titular head of a corporate group, not an absolute rightholder.[1] He allocates land, cattle, and other property accruing to the compound family group among its elementary families, and this allocation limits the proportion in which it will eventually be inherited by the sons in each elementary family. He is also able to make levies of property for special purposes from all his elementary families. But in all situations involving social groups wider than the homestead, its head is subject to the decisions of the leader-in-council of the lineage segment to which he belongs. The exclusiveness of elementary families is potentially high, but in practice depends on the skill of the homestead head in securing and maintaining harmony, and on the mutual compatibility or otherwise of co-wives. When these factors favour, co-wives may be seen co-operating in many tasks, taking it in turns to supply the husband—or one another's children—with food, combining as a team for garden work, or sharing one another's water-supply. But it cannot be denied that the Luo regard friction between co-wives as being a more normal state of affairs. Behind these situational variations lies the inviolable right of the husband to regular cooked food from each wife, of each wife to regular sexual attention from her husband, and the general responsibility of each elementary family for its own self-maintenance granted its rightful assistance from the husband in his proper part of each task.

The rearing of children is woven into this framework. The baby's first contacts are naturally with its mother, who may not finally wean it till it is about two years old, unless as a result of a subsequent pregnancy she has to do so sooner; for suckling a child with a younger sibling in the womb is regarded as robbing and endangering the latter. The baby sleeps in its mother's hut at night and sleeps and later plays near it during the day. It is more closely associated with the other members of its own elementary family, especially the female ones circling round the hearth for the preparation and cooking of food. Other members of the compound family will be hardly less well known from their presence together inside the homestead hedge, but all non-members of the homestead will be comparative strangers except very close relatives or near neighbours who are constant visitors within it.

Babies of either sex are soon each put in the charge of one of the older unmarried girls, probably a real or classificatory sister. This brings them in contact with the world outside the homestead, where a number of these nurse-girls (*Dhudhou jopiel*) meet regularly in informal play groups. By the time children can run about on their own they too form play groups, including both girls and boys from several homesteads. Gradually the interests of the two sexes diverge, the boys going off with

[1] The Luo homestead in all phases of its life-cycle would remain the definition of a corporate group in Weber's sense. See *Theory of Political and Economic Organization*, p. 139.

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
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I

INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

Feeding

Under one year. For the first month of a baby's life its chief food is its mother's milk. But when the mother's milk is insufficient, gruel may be given as early as at two to three weeks old. Although cow's milk is now sometimes used instead of gruel, it is still chiefly regarded as a modern introduction by the missionaries in an effort to promote infant health. 853 [177] [197]

Between the ages of one and three months, gruel and breast-feeding play about equal parts. When the mothers go out to work, suckling tends to be limited to mornings and evenings. The average age at which babies are given gruel is one month. From the third to the sixth month milk from the breast and gruel continue to form the child's main diet, but after this, gruel begins to prevail over breast-feeding. Although maize flour is occasionally used in the preparation of gruel, the usual flour for this purpose is obtained from sorghum and eleusine, a species of millet. Whenever possible a little sour milk is added to the mixture. Between five and six months certain children have frequent tastes of adult food given to them by their nurses. [262]

Although nurses are allowed to give gruel to the children, difficulties in handling a baby sometimes result in under-feeding, which is often made worse by the low food-content of the gruel itself. Through training by nurses, babies are accustomed to adult food before their mothers actually give it to them, so it can happen that [254]

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853 when a mother is eating she will hear her child cry out [154] for some of her food.

From six to nine months, gruel continues to be the staple article of diet. In certain strict families adult food is not given until the child is over a year old. Babies fed on cow's milk begin using adult food during the first or second month.

Restrictions on the suckling of babies. It is considered a [784] breach of taboo for a nursing mother to suckle her [761] neighbour's child. This restriction is based on the fear that some woman with poor milk may, in suckling a [177] baby, kill it. One of my informants pointed out that in the early days of missionary work an attempt to break this taboo had failed. She said that many of the children thus suckled had died, and the attempt had been aban- [603] doned. One exception to the restriction, however, is that of a mother-in-law. In cases of necessity she is permitted to suckle her daughter-in-law's child because it is assumed that her milk has stood the test.

853 595 In rare instances there seems to be different treatment of male and female children in a polygamous home with regard to suckling. Some of my informants stated that inter-suckling is permitted if all the nursing mothers have female babies.

[587] Nevertheless, the taboo against inter-suckling of male babies is reinforced by the fact that it is possible for a son to marry one of his father's younger wives. Hence a woman refuses to suckle a child who might become her husband on the death of the father.

853 [177] The social restriction with regard to the suckling of infants is still observed with rigidity, and there are no evidences of a change even under the impact of modern ideas.

Methods of feeding. No force is used in feeding young babies. A little gruel in a small container is put to the

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lips. The mouth is gently raised while a small amount of the gruel is let in. Forcible feeding takes place when children begin to push the container from their lips, preferring their mothers' milk. [853]

In forcible feeding, the child's head is rested against the mother's breast while the feet are firmly held in position between her thighs. If the child is difficult to manage, an assistant may be called to hold its hands. The mother rests the edge of the left hand below the child's lips and pours gruel in the hollow thus formed by the hand. While the child is crying, she closes the nostrils by pressing its upper lip against the openings. Thus in attempting to draw air through the mouth the child takes in a mouthful of gruel. The mother or the nurse may then dip her hand in cold water and wipe the child's abdomen in an attempt to cool the rapidly-swallowed food. After it has drunk a considerable quantity the child is set free. If the mother is present, it may finally be pacified by a short period of suckling.

Although women insist on this form of feeding because of its traditional value, it is also a method they use when they are in a great hurry. To have time to do their other work they must feed their children as quickly as possible. A child which has been given gruel does not cry for food for a long time.

The feeding of younger children is generally left to nurses, though often they are very young and lack experience by European standards. Sometimes a child may be found unconscious through over-feeding or prolonged choking. When this occurs, a responsible person holds the child by the legs, head downward, and then runs with it, shaking out the contents of its stomach; after which the child is laid down in a cool place to regain its strength. In extreme cases the child may die. Some children are quite unable to take gruel, and in [854] [757]

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153 such circumstances they have to depend on their mothers' milk.

Although the time and nature of her work may force a woman to feed her child at certain hours, there is otherwise no fixed time for feeding babies. If the mother is present, the child is suckled whenever it wants to. Thus babies having such treatment grow up with a particularly strong liking for their mothers' breasts. As soon as a baby is big enough, the mother begins to limit her suckling and to increase the frequency of gruel-taking. The frequency of suckling is greater for babies between one and three months, the intervals increasing with the age of the child. Daily absence of the mother when she is working at a distance may also impose longer intervals between the successive sucklings than would be the case if the mother were nearby, or within the village. Chil-
[177] dren in more enlightened families are started on cow's milk after one or two months, and are given gruel after six months.

There is a widespread belief that gruel strengthens the bones, and therefore should be a very important article of diet just before the child begins to walk.

Cleanliness

154 There is a general slackness in the washing of children by Luo mothers, which increases as the children grow older, but sometimes, especially among the more ad-
[178] vanced people, they are kept tidy regularly. It may be of interest to know that, in the past, they were washed early every morning in cold water in the belief that this would make them strong. Whenever the children empty their bowels they are cleaned with old rags or soft leaves. The limited supply of old rags makes the use of leaves more common.

Bedding and clothes. No clothes are especially made for the babies.

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Childless marriages. Failure to have a child is a great disaster in the home. The idea of the perpetuation of their kind is so deeply rooted in the minds of the Luo people that a childless marriage generally culminates in the breaking up of the home concerned, the husband usually being advised by his relatives to marry a second wife. Although results may prove that it is the husband who is defective, priority is always given to men to prove their fecundity. Thus a woman is forbidden by the social conventions to attempt to prove on her own initiative that she can give birth to children.

If through the second marriage the husband is proved to be sterile, his wives may one by one desert him. On the other hand, this great desire for children may lead him to carry on his name through the secret offices of the woman's brothers-in-law. Otherwise he must face the inevitable fate of having his family broken up.

Women's diet after birth. For the first week after childbirth, the mother's food is limited to gruel, fish, and green vegetables. 'Bo', which is one of the vegetable pulses, is excluded on account of the trouble it gives to the stomach. During this early period meat is not eaten because most women complain that it makes the stomach tight. Hard food, such as boiled maize, is also avoided at this time. Although tea and coffee are occasionally drunk by the more fortunate families, the drink which pleases women most at this time is gruel. They are allowed to take a lot of it as people believe that it helps in the formation of the milk which is so important for feeding the new baby.

The period of this considered treatment is brief, lasting for about a month at the most. Much depends on the economic resources of the family concerned, and the poorer the family is, the shorter is the time that careful attention can be given.

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512 462 264 [853] [356] *Daily rhythm of family duties.* The daily programme of a mother with a young child is divided into two major phases, corresponding with the morning and the evening meals. In the morning the activities include the preparation of gruel for the child, preceded by suckling it and sweeping the house. When prepared, the gruel is left with a nurse, to be given to the child when it cries. The mother then goes to the field or to any major work of the day. Preparation of the morning meal begins at about 9 a.m., and by 10 a.m. the family disperses again, the men perhaps to herd cattle or to go to market, and the women to fetch firewood or bring water from the river.

[178] The idea of having a meal freshly prepared in the morning is of recent origin. In the past, people ate cold food preserved from the previous evening meal. A great proportion of what is eaten during the week comes from the gardens.

[178] In former days, women were expected to prepare an afternoon gruel for their husbands at about 3 p.m. This is still the custom in some families, but modern women are quite ignorant of the practice in its traditional form.

868 619 *The social attitude towards male and female children.* The difference in the social attitude towards male and female children arises from considering them in relation to the future of the lineage to which they belong. A male child is looked upon as a dynamic element in the lineal structure. On the other hand, a female child, though a potential source of wealth, is regarded as an exporter of fertility from her parents' lineage to the lineage of her husband. Thus, if she becomes the mother of many children, her larger numbers are looked upon with disfavour as taking something away from her original family. This results in a superstitious feeling which affects her visits to the parental home.

[842] [593]